

NEWS RELEASE

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Former Horace Mann Employee Charged with Embezzlement

Springfield, Illinois – Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, announced that a federal grand jury today returned an indictment charging Gerri E. Ripka, age 50, of Springfield, Illinois, with embezzling and misappropriating more than \$150,000 from Horace Mann Insurance Companies, most of which was intended for United Way of Central Illinois.

According to the indictment, Ripka was the assistant to a Horace Mann executive from 1990 until she resigned on November 15, 2004. From approximately 1999 until her resignation, Ripka was also the bookkeeper and coordinator for Horace Mann's annual United Way Campaign. The indictment alleges that from approximately 1999 until her resignation in 2004, Ripka embezzled money from the company by cashing company checks, using the company credit card for personal purchases, and stealing cash collected at special fund-raising events. According to the indictment, Horace Mann entrusted Ripka with a checking account established to receive donations and disburse money to United Way, as well as a company credit card and cash raised through special events.

According to the indictment, Ripka embezzled most of the money by writing and cashing approximately 328 company checks for around \$145,735. She allegedly converted most of that cash to her own use and reimbursed the company only \$2,489. Ripka allegedly used the company credit card approximately 467 times for personal purchases worth more than \$40,000, which included groceries, cosmetics, magazines, and pet food, among other things. The

indictment further alleges Ripka used more than \$45,000 collected by Horace Mann employees during special fund-raising events for United Way. Ripka allegedly maintained exclusive control of the cash generated by these events, which included taffy apple sales, carnation sales, “denim-day” campaigns, silent auctions and golf outings, among others.

In announcing the indictment, U.S. Attorney Rodger Heaton stated, “This case is the product of impressive cooperation between business and government in combating corporate fraud. As soon as Horace Mann officials discovered the alleged embezzlements, they thoroughly investigated the matter, referred it to our office, and cooperated fully with the FBI and our office. I specifically commend Horace Mann and its executives for bringing this matter to our attention and for treating white collar crime no better than street crime.”

If convicted, the offense of embezzlement carries a statutory penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph H. Hartzler is prosecuting the case.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.